



## Aids and Adaptations Policy

Meeting of:	Housing and Communities Committee
Date:	27 June 2024
Agenda item:	1
Report of:	Director of Housing and Communities
Title:	Aids and Adaptations Policy 2024-27
Report focus:	Strategy and Governance
Report for:	Assurance and Decision

## Contributions to Plan A 2022/25

Strategy	Objectives						
Transforming Customer Experience and Digital Services	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>		
Planet A	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	9 <input type="checkbox"/>	10 <input type="checkbox"/>	11 <input type="checkbox"/>	12 <input type="checkbox"/>
Supporting Sustainable Places	13 <input type="checkbox"/>	14 <input type="checkbox"/>	15 <input type="checkbox"/>	16 <input type="checkbox"/>			
Supporting Sustainable Tenancies	17 <input type="checkbox"/>	18 <input type="checkbox"/>	19 <input type="checkbox"/>				
Providing Sustainable Quality Homes	20 <input type="checkbox"/>	21 <input type="checkbox"/>	22 <input type="checkbox"/>				
Building and Acquiring Sustainable Homes	23 <input type="checkbox"/>	24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25 <input type="checkbox"/>				

## Introduction

1. This report presents the updated Aids and Adaptations Policy for approval.

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2. New Consumer Standards were implemented by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) on 1 April 2024. Forming part of the new Consumer Standards, the Safety and Quality Standard sets out required outcomes for Registered providers (RPs) in relation to stock quality, decency, health and safety, repairs and maintenance and adaptations. The Standard requires RPs to deliver the following outcomes related to aids and adaptations:

### Adaptations - Required Outcomes

- 1.5.1 Registered providers must assist tenants seeking housing adaptations to access appropriate services.

### Specific Expectations

- 2.4.1 Registered providers must clearly communicate to tenants and relevant organisations how they will assist tenants seeking housing adaptations services.
- 2.4.2 Registered providers must co-operate with tenants, appropriate local authority departments and other relevant organisations so that a housing adaptations service is available to tenants where appropriate.
3. The Tenancy Standard is also relevant to aids and adaptations, requiring RPs to allocate homes that are designated, designed, or adapted to meet specific needs in a way that is compatible with the purpose of the housing and co-operate with local authorities' strategic housing functions and assist local authorities to fulfil their duties to meet identified local housing need.
4. This report sets out a revised Policy meets the requirements of the Consumer Standards and has been shaped and influenced by transactional and amplified customer voice. A copy of the proposed Policy is provided at Appendix 1.

## Findings and analysis

5. Nationally, the need to provide housing for older people is recognised by all major political parties as a strategic priority. Our population is living with greater ill-health for longer periods and the proportion of older people in the population is increasing rapidly. Nationally, in mid-2016 there were 1.6 million people aged 85 and over; by mid-2041 this is anticipated at 3.2m.
6. In Durham, population change between 2011 and 2021 saw an increase of 20.5% in people aged 65 years and over with a decrease of 3.2% in people aged 15 to 64 years. As at 1 June 2024 there were 11,176 registered housing applications within the Durham Key Options Choice Based Lettings Partnership. Of these 3,307 (30%) were from applicants aged 60+ and 2,494 (22%) have need of a major adaptation to enable independent living (ramped or level access, a flat floor shower or wet room, or a stair lift). Our applications data reflects this overall need; 1,915 (17%) of total applications received were administered and of these 420 (21.9%) require major adaptations.
7. As at 1 June 2024, our stock comprised 8,889 homes of which 2,967 (33%) are bungalows. 27% of our stock has had major adaptations to meet the housing needs of older and vulnerable tenants (2,407 homes) and of these 1,475 (61%) have multiple adaptations. Major adaptations to support bathing represent the highest proportion of adaptations. 1,310 homes (14% of total stock) have wet rooms installed with a further 548 homes (6%) having level access showers. We have a total of 10,789 tenants, across 8,889 tenancies, of which 4760 (44%) are aged 60+.
8. Durham County Council's emerging Housing Strategy is positioned to respond to the issue of an aging populace. The Strategy establishes five key joined-up priorities: increasing delivery of new homes, ensuring access to appropriate, safe homes that meets individual needs, ensuring high quality homes and landlord services, delivering placemaking creating great and sustainable places to live and ensuring a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people.

9. This focus on the growing need for homes for older people is consistently reflected in all housing strategies of local authorities where we hold stock. In this context, the revised Policy reflects our ongoing commitment to ensure older and vulnerable people are supported with a responsive, personalised aids and adaptations service to support them to live safely and independently for longer in their homes and communities. This contributes to our aim to make best use of our housing stock, by meeting the needs of local people and supporting the Local Authority statutory responsibilities and strategic ambitions.
10. In 2023/24 we successfully delivered 233 major adaptations to our homes, 142 (64%) via Durham County Council and the Home Improvement Agency and 91 (36%) through our own contractual arrangements. Level Access Showers, Stairlifts, Ramping and Handrails accounted for 78% of all major adaptations in 2023/24 with 180 jobs completed within 135 homes. In terms of age, 154 (66%) were adaptations to support tenants aged 60+, with the remaining 79 (34%) targeted to those under 60. There has been no avoidable tenancy turnover following these adaptations, they demonstrably support tenancy sustainment. Through targeting support to older and vulnerable people, personalised aids and adaptations contribute to independent living and tenancy sustainment and are an important part of delivering on our Plan A 2022-25 ambitions in this area.
11. In Q3, 2023/24 we identified that we had received six stage 1 complaints about various elements of the delivery of the aids and adaptations service. Within these complaints we identified 12 individual complaint elements and nine (75%) of these were upheld. We had also received six service requests during this period, one of which escalated to a stage 1 complaint. We compared this data with:
  - the percentage of transactions resulting in a complaint (6.6%) and,
  - customer satisfaction levels 83% against a target of 94%.
12. Over the year we completed 91 major adaptations, all complaints related to the service we provided during major works, this means 6.6% became a complaint. We therefore included this service in our case review process.

13. The cross-department case review findings identified a number of opportunities to improve the service, raising 14 improvement actions. This resulted in a service improvement plan, which highlighted opportunities for 'quick wins' in relation to improving contact with customers and case monitoring. Longer-term improvements such as a revised policy and supporting processes, improving communication and joined-up working with the local authority were also identified. Although some of the actions are not due for completion until Q2, 2024/25, we have received no further complaints and satisfaction levels have increased to 98.15% in Q4, 2023/24.
14. To improve the customer experience whilst tenants are awaiting major adaptations, our Occupational Therapist liaises directly with the Durham County Council Home Improvement Agency and has agreed improved data sharing arrangements with the Council, including improved completion dates for works.
15. The positive impact of these interventions can be seen in improved tenant satisfaction, with a 27% reduction in chase ups and no further recorded complaints during Quarter 4 2023/24. We are focused on reducing chase ups further to continue to improve customer experience and will do that by continuing to improve communication. Figure 1 sets out satisfaction performance trend across 2023/24 which demonstrates an improving upward trend as service interventions were introduced.

Figure 1 – Tenant Satisfaction with the Aids and Adaptations Service 2023/24

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	2023/24
Satisfaction (Target 95%)	83.33%	88.89%	93.75%	98.15%	93.81%

16. Learning from this complaint case review has been incorporated into the revised Policy with new, explicit policy statements setting out commitments ensuring tenants receive timely and effective communication prior, during and after a major adaptation (8.5) and data sharing with Local Authorities is emphasised to ensure our data is up to date and actively communicated so tenants are kept informed to improve customer experience (8.6).

17. The importance of data and effective utilisation of data has been emphasised in the Policy. A new statement establishes the need to maintain accurate and up-to-date asset management data with relevant information on all major adaptations within our homes and the requirement to utilise this data, and other complementary datasets such as tenant age, disability, or health condition, to effectively inform service delivery and improvement (8.9).
18. Making best use of our available homes (often described as “right-sizing”) is also highlighted within the policy (8.4), with strengthened contextualisation of our regulatory obligation set out within the Tenancy Standard to co-operate with local authorities’ strategic housing functions and assist local authorities to fulfil their duties to meet identified local housing need. Making best use of housing stock is a key component in meeting local demand, maximising supply of family accommodation for those in need. The policy reaffirms our approach to supporting older tenants under occupying family accommodation who require adaptations through provision of support and advice to access a more appropriate, sustainable home.
19. The right of tenants to appeal against a decision to refuse an adaptation where we are the decision maker has been strengthened in the Policy to deliver increased transparency and accountability (8.19). This has also been updated on our website pages which advertise the Aids and Adaptations Service.
20. The layout of the Policy has been updated to follow the standard template and therefore does not show tracked changes; significant changes are highlighted for the Committee’s attention.

## Material considerations

### Strategy

21. This policy contributes to objectives within the Supporting Sustainable Tenancies Strategy, specifically Objective 17 which targets the provision of tailored interventions to sustain tenancies, improve health and wellbeing, and maintain independence. A key delivery action within this objective is the provision of personalised aids and adaptations, embracing new and emerging digital solutions to facilitate independent living and sustain tenancies. Aids and adaptations are personalised to older and vulnerable tenants, responding to tenant needs, improving their health and wellbeing and supporting them to remain within their communities.
22. The aids and adaptations service ensures we continue to make best use of our existing housing stock, meet local housing need and support Local Authorities to discharge their statutory duties in relation to enabling access to appropriate housing for those in need. This strategic imperative supports the objectives set out in Durham County Council's draft Housing Strategy.
23. The policy also contributes to Objective 21 within the Providing Sustainable Quality Sustainable Homes Strategy to provide homes that are safe, exceed the needs and meet the aspirations of our tenants.

### Customer voice

24. The customer voice that has informed the Policy has come from national census data from the Office for National Statistics, statistical demographic data through Durham County Council, internal transactional data on aids and adaptations being delivered to our tenants, complaints data, satisfaction performance information and amplified customer voice through a focus group in Quarter 1 2024/25. This customer voice has been considered in the development of the revised Policy to ensure it meets the need of tenants and residents today and in the future.



25. An engaged tenants focus group was held in June 2024 to consider transactional data, proposed revisions to the policy and, in common with the insight gained from analysis of customer satisfaction data and complaints, engaged tenants also identified the necessity to ensure effective communication that meets individual needs, particularly in relation to timescales for adaptations being delivered via a third party. This need is reflected within the revised Policy and ongoing work to improve the tenant experience of the service.
26. The themes of timely and effective communication, successful partnership working, and data-led personalisation of service delivery are all reflected in strengthened commitments set out within the Policy and were affirmed by the focus group of engaged tenants. These are underpinned by a set of responsive performance measures within the Performance Management Framework (PMF). Further service information will be presented to Committee via the Housing Services Progress Update in September 2024.

### **Impact assessments**

27. An Equality and Vulnerability Impact Assessment (EVA) was undertaken during the development of the Policy. The Policy considers vulnerable individuals, families, and those with complex, diverse needs who require support to enable independent living to sustain tenancies. Protected characteristics of age and disability were highlighted within the EVA, emphasising the importance of ensuring fair and equitable access to service to these groups as well as personalised support for any intrusive works to homes which require reasonable adjustments.

### **Legal and regulatory**

28. This policy is aligned to relevant regulations and legislation in supporting the provision of aids and adaptations to tenants in need, including supporting the local authority statutory responsibilities in relation to adaptations, such as via the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, the Disabled Facilities Grant (England) order 2008, etc.

29. This policy supports the delivery of outcomes as required by the RSH Consumer Standards related to the delivery of aids and adaptations, set out specifically within the Tenancy Standard (making best use of stock, supporting local authority statutory duties) and the Safety and Quality Standard (enabling access aids and adaptations to tenants in need), and Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (fair and equitable access to services, trust and respect)

### **Finances and value for money**

30. An annual budget of £441k is aligned to the provision of aids and adaptations, the majority of which (£315k) supports delivery of major adaptations to our homes. To provide support to our tenants in accessing Disabled Facilities Grants, we provide a contribution of 20% to Durham County Council towards Disabled Facilities Grants which supports effective partnership working and service delivery to our tenants on need.
31. An inhouse, dedicated Occupational Therapist (OT) is employed within the Housing and Communities Team. This resource is critical to engaging older and vulnerable tenants sensitively and through our valued behaviours, supporting the assessment of need for adaptations and acting as liaison with Local Authority DFG teams and the respective Home Improvement Agency.
32. The Tenancy Visit Programme is another route used to help sustain tenancies including identifying tenants who may need aids and adaptations to enable safe, independent living. Since the programme was enhanced (January 2023), 177 tenants have been referred to our OT for an assessment of medical need and their current housing situation. To date, 41 of these have had a major adaptation completed and a further 27 have works planned.

### **Risk**

33. The delivery of an effective aids and adaptations service targets personalised support, empowering and supporting tenants to age positively, improve their lives, sustain their tenancies and remain independent whilst ensuring their safety, health, and wellbeing. Board considered a separate report on 20 June 2024, reviewing the Strategic Risks which has introduced a specific risk of 'Failure to make best use of housing stock' and 'Failure to provide services that support tenants to maintain their tenancy'. Additionally, the existing strategic risk of 'Failure to demonstrate compliance with/ breach of RSH requirements, including Regulatory Standards' includes the services within the Aids and Adaptations policy.

## Conclusions

34. The revised Policy strengthens our existing approach, anchored in Plan A 2022-25, to target aids and adaptations to older and vulnerable tenants to enable them to live independently for longer. Specific, revised policy statements reflect and respond to individual customer needs now and in the future.
35. The policy addresses customer feedback and has been developed through extensive transactional and amplified customer voice. It reflects the needs and aspirations of tenants and is underpinned by effective use of data to personalise service delivery.
36. The Policy is supported by a robust procedural, performance and assurance framework which monitors customer impact, appropriate service standards and customer satisfaction measures which will be reported on to the Board, Committee and Tenants.

## Recommendations

37. That the Housing and Communities Committee:
  - Approves the revised Aids and Adaptations Policy.

## Implementation

38. The Director of Housing and Communities is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy.
39. This policy will be communicated to employees and training will be provided to ensure understanding of the policy requirements.
  - Employees will be supported in delivery of the policy within an appropriate procedural framework that provides management oversight and assurance that actions undertaken are delivered within this procedural framework.
  - In addition to specific training and awareness for our employees to identify the need for aids and adaptations, this policy will be communicated to tenants, via publication on our website, including in an easy read format, along with information materials provided to non-digital tenants during tenancy visits.

## Appendices

1	Aids and Adaptations Policy 2024-27
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### Background papers

Last report on this issue:	Aids and Adaptations Policy 2022-24, EMT, 23 March 2022
Other key information:	<p>RSH Consumer Standards Regulatory standards for landlords - GOV.UK (<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>)</p> <p>County Durham Demographics   Age, Ethnicity, Religion, Wellbeing (<a href="http://varbes.com">varbes.com</a>)</p> <p>Census and statistical info - Durham County Council</p>